



The Power of Peers: Why Peer Recovery Specialists Are Essential

SMI Enterprises
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Peer Specialists Can...



- Link to resources and help to navigate the service world
- Create and/or lead skill-building activities
- Serve as a mentor/role-model
- Help clients articulate personal goals
- Advocate for clients and/or programs
- Engage new or “hard to reach” clients
- Facilitate groups
- Facilitate access to self-help groups and serve as natural supports (NAMI, DBPSA, AA, NA)
- Assist with community integration
- Challenge unacknowledged stigma
- Liaise between consumers and non-consumers—interpret and mediate
- Provide the clients’ point of view at team meetings and planning sessions

Peer Specialists Do the Following...



Help consumers aspire to roles which emphasize their strengths by

- sharing their firsthand experiences with their own recovery, mental health treatment
- offering hope and reassurance

Provide services and interventions to consumers which focus on recovery by

- educating about mental illness and substance use disorders
- teaching coping skills to manage symptoms, stress
- building social supports
- using medications effectively
- reducing relapses

Participate in daily team meetings, treatment planning meetings, and ITTs as full member of the team

Benefits of Peers with Lived Experience as Providers

Peers Provide Support Differently Because They Can Offer...

- Practical help based on knowledge gained through similar experience
- Self-disclosure and incorporating elements of friendship and encouragement
- Hope and reassurance, and they convey they understand what may seem inexplicable to most non-consumers
- More patience with unusual behaviors
- First-hand experience with mental health system provides unique insights & practical skills for accessing services
- A different level of connection

Benefits of Peers with Lived Experience as Providers



Ways Consumers Served by the Team Benefit

- Peer providers often have extensive knowledge of social services available to help others
- Consumers benefit from a level of empathy and understanding about some of the struggles that come with mental health and substance use diagnosis/challenges
- Acceptance - working with, respecting, and relating to consumers from an experiential knowledge base; "I've been there too"
- Positive role-modeling
- Shared coping strategies
- Aspire to roles that emphasize their strengths, and place value on what they have learned through their own recovery journey
- Others?

Benefits of Peers with Lived Experience as Providers

Ways in Which the Peer Providers Benefit

- Increased sense of value, confidence and self-worth
- Avenues for personal growth and development
- Stable employment
- Development of additional skills
- Ability to “give back” and share own experiences to help others recover
- Aspire to roles that emphasize their strengths, and place value on what they have learned through their own recovery journey
- Others?

Benefits of Peers with Lived Experience as Providers

Ways in Which Agencies & Non-Peer Providers Benefit

- Educate staff/co-workers and administration
- Create specialists within your agency on “Illness/Wellness Management”
- Provide insight and understanding to help non-consumers better manage challenging situations with consumers
- Help professional staff become aware of their own prejudices and ways they may stigmatize clients
- Shift negative attitudes of professionals about poor prognosis of people with SMI
- Increase likelihood that the consumer voice is integrated into planning, evaluating, and developing services
- Others?

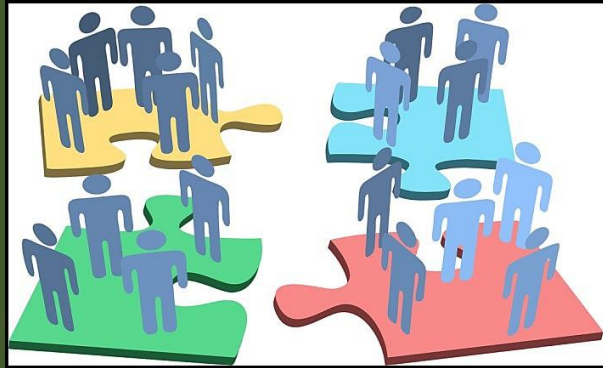
Gaging Agency/Team Readiness

- Conduct organization and team-level surveys to determine where staff with employing peer specialists (all staff, not just clinical staff)
 - Purpose is to identify the fears, misconceptions, barriers, and biases that staff may hold. It is NOT a survey to ask if they like the idea
 - Use survey data to help develop strategies and training for staff to eliminate those barriers
- Bring in peer providers from other agencies to provide Q & A or technical assistance
- Send staff to other agencies that employee peers to shadow and ask questions
- Deploy “champions” within your agency to assist with culture shift and organizational change

Hiring

- Create clear a job description/job duties
- Pay a living wage; consider what counts as “experience”
- Involve multiple people in the hiring/interviewing process
- Avoid “tokenism”
 - Don’t hire just one peer specialist in your agency
 - Being a consumer alone does not make one qualified to do a job
 - Must possess additional key skills/meet key criteria
 - The right person may be a “provider” who happens to be a consumer—they possess key “provider-type” skills & qualities we look for across all providers (good listener, empathic...)
 - Must be hired into the identified “peer role” you are hiring for
 - Skills may vary depending on who the peer is and what they bring “to the table”, just as any other potential employee

Redefining Relationships: Dual Relationships



Potential Concern: The Peer specialist is both a client of your agency and a co-worker

Strategies:

- Facilitate communication across all people involved
- Recognize that multiple relationships exist in life (especially in rural areas)
- Make determinations on individual basis with policies and rules that allow for flexibility
- In urban areas with multiple provider options, might require that a peer not receive services at the same agency in which they are employed
- Use telemedicine options so peer can receive services at a provider if they are some distance away
- Peer does not receive services from the same department/team/staff in which they work
- Care is made to secure medical records of the peer who also receives services at the same agency

Training, Orientation, & Supervision



- Trauma-informed HR Practices
- Robust orientation-don't assume
 - Ensure staff understand work hours, how to use PTO, how to call in sick/late, acceptable language, meeting expectations, non-traditional breaks or hours, allow for second chances/leniency when able
 - Use of plain language & Communication, “Universal Design” concept, simplify processes, documents/paperwork, documentation
- State certification training when available
- Shadow other peer specialists (in house or go to another agency if need be)
 - Also shadow other roles on the team/cross-training
- Continuing education
- Provide peer group supervision as well as 1:1 supervision
- Hired to be a “Specialist” in wellness/illness management
 - Full benefits of hiring peers will not occur if they are trained to only carry out traditional “case management” tasks or “left over tasks”

Examples of Curricula Used by Peer Specialists

- WHAM (Whole Health Action Management)
 - Person-centered goals, weekly action plan, daily/weekly personal log, one-to-one peer support, weekly peer support group
- WMR/IMR (Illness Management & Recovery)
 - 12 module curriculum based on identifying a recovery goal and learning steps to successfully achieve that goal
- WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan)
- Solutions for Wellness
 - Lilly Pharmaceuticals toolkit
- Others?

Tips From Practicing Peer Specialists

- Meet people where they are during each session and be flexible enough to do that
- Build rapport with each person and preparing yourself for each meeting is important
- Engagement: Being able to share info at their level to show that you (peer specialist) are not just a “part of the system”. Coming at it from a different frame of mind – Don’t put unnecessary expectations onto the individuals you work with
- Have that hope and belief that someone can improve/recover, even when other staff may have “given up”
- Be willing as a peer to speak up and say when you need to “be done for the day” but also be willing to give yourself time to “work up to” a difficult session. Self-care is essential
- Don’t be afraid to ask for help when needed and communicate with your supervisor
- See yourself as a specialist on the team – Advocate and educate to help others (coworkers, supervisor, etc.) see you as a specialist as well
- Always be willing to expand your skills and go the extra mile—professional development to expand your role

Resources

- www.Rand.org *Mental Health Consumer Providers*; Matt Chinman
- *Hiring Consumers as Providers: Barriers and Alternative Solutions*; Linda Carlson, Charles Rapp, etc; Community Mental Health Journal
- *Positive Partnerships: How Consumers and Nonconsumers Can Work Together as Service Providers*; Mardi Solomon, Jessica Jonikas, etc.; National Research & Training Center on Psychiatric Disability, Chicago, Ill
- Recovery to Practice: Resource Center for Behavioral Health Professionals Vol 2, issue 11, 3/25/2011
- *Using Peers to Support Physical & Mental Health Integration for Adults with Serious Mental Illness*; National Academy for State Health Policy; jan 2016; Kitty Purington
- Pillars of Peer Support—SAMHSA-HRSA Center for Integrated Health Solutions

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